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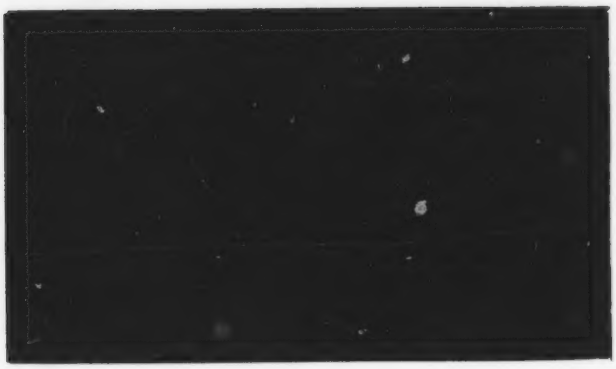

Alberta

SENIOR CITIZENS SECRETARIAT

A STUDY OF SENIOR CENTRES IN ALBERTA

Final Report

June 30, 1988

Senior Citizens Secretariat

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The Alberta Senior Citizens Secretariat wishes to express appreciation to the Seniors' Consultant Program (formerly the Volunteer Community Consultant Project) of the Alberta Council on Aging and the senior volunteers who assisted with this survey. Appreciation is also expressed to Patricia Looney, M.A., who directed the survey.

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A STUDY OF SENIOR CENTRES IN ALBERTA

Executive Summary

The report "A Study of Senior Centres in Alberta" describes the findings of 222 questionnaires and 278 telephone interviews which were conducted with senior centres in Alberta during March and April 1988. The intention of the study was to collect information on the size, location, membership, programs, and administrative and financial structure of Alberta's senior centres. The questionnaires were administered by mail, obtaining a response rate of 77 percent. The interviews were conducted by telephone by senior volunteers, obtaining a response rate of 90 percent.

The findings are organized into five general categories: demographic information, governing body and documents, membership, programs and activities, and finances. The principal findings within each category are listed below:

Demographic Information

- the average senior centre has 100 members (median value);
- senior centres are in all sizes of community: 28 percent urban, 30 percent small city, and 42 percent rural;
- centres are open for an average of 28 hours per week;
- half of the centres own their facilities;
- on average, centres have been operating for 11 years.

Governing Body and Documents

- 94 percent are registered societies;
- 91 percent have by-laws;
- 76 percent have written goals and objectives;
- 94 percent have a boards of directors;

- 100 percent have executive committees;
- on average, 38 percent of a centre's members attend meetings;
- 59 percent have set terms of office for elected officers;
- 35 percent have paid staff;
- 98 percent report their centres are running well.

Membership

- 84 percent have more female members than male members;
- the average age of the youngest members is 54 years old;
- the average age of the oldest members is 88 years old;
- on average, 39 percent of a centre's members attend the centre each week;
- 47 percent have increased their membership in the last year.

Programs and Activities

- 87 percent saw the centre's most important role as providing social contact and activities for seniors;
- 48 percent offer an outreach program;
- 99 percent offer recreational activities;
- 96 percent offer social activities;
- 83 percent have fund-raising activities;
- 70 percent have sports activities;
- 64 percent offer educational activities;
- 52 percent offer service activities.

Finances

- 50 percent use a budget;
- the most common sources of funding are membership fees and fund-raising projects;
- the least common source of funding is federal grants;
- 77 percent reported adequate financial support to ensure future operations;
- 54 percent are registered charitable organizations.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report details the results of a study of senior centres in Alberta which was conducted by the Senior Citizens Secretariat. A senior centre can be defined as a "community focal point where older people (seniors) come as individuals or in groups to take part in programs or activities which enhance their dignity and support their independence."[1]

The study included all known senior centres which met the following basic definition: a group of seniors which meets at least six hours each week, and which meets regularly in the same place. Small social groups within seniors' residences and nursing homes were excluded from this definition.

The intention of the study was to update the results of a similar study done in 1981[2] which collected information on the facilities and equipment, membership, funding sources, staff, and activities of 211 centres in Alberta.

In the last decade, there has been a shift in the focus of senior centres from concerns about buildings, equipment, and membership to concerns about programs, activities, and quality issues. In the past 20 years, the senior centre movement has grown dramatically, and the majority of financial resources was spent on developing facilities and on provisions to meet this growing need. More recently, there is a greater concern about the quality of activities and programs offered by centres.

The current study reflects this shift in focus, with the emphasis on the way centres are run, how well they are running, and the programs and activities which they offer. Specifically, information was gathered relating to five areas: demographics, governing body and documents, membership, programs and activities, and finances. As well, respondents had the opportunity to make comments about the centres, and to mention

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1 (Senior Citizens Bureau, 1983: Senior Centres in Alberta, Guidelines for Organization Standards and Practice).

2 A Survey of Senior Centres in Alberta, 1981, Planning Secretariat, Alberta Social Services and Community Health.

any problems or needs for information. These comments and problems are discussed in Section 5.

2. BACKGROUND

To fully understand the place of senior centres in the community, it is helpful to have some background on the history and development of senior centres in North America. The first senior centre was established in New York in the early 1940s. A group of social workers recognized a need for community-based services aimed at older people, and opened the Hodson Senior Centre to meet those needs. The objective of this first senior centre was to provide a place for seniors to meet peers, to communicate and socialize, and to focus on new roles based on the potential, experience, and skill of older people. Gradually, the centre developed beyond social and recreational activities to include programs and services of many types.

The first senior centres in Alberta developed in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Today there are more than 350 centres in urban and rural areas in Alberta providing a variety of services and opportunities for older people. These centres operate with the philosophy that aging is part of the normal developmental process, and that individuals at any age need peer interaction, meaningful activities, and a voice in decisions that affect the older population.

3. METHODOLOGY

The information for this project was collected using two methods: a mailed questionnaire and a short telephone interview. The questionnaire and six telephone interview schedules were developed by the Senior Citizens Secretariat in conjunction with a group of senior consultants from the Alberta Council on Aging's Volunteer Community Consultant Project. The questionnaire was designed to contain only objective questions which could be answered by choosing "yes" or "no," or by filling in a blank. Those questions which were more subjective and which required a longer response, were included in the telephone interviews.

The telephone interview was intended to serve as a reminder to return the questionnaire, as well as a method to collect information. In order to keep each interview short, it was decided that each centre would be questioned on a maximum of two topics. For this purpose, six interview schedules were devised, each containing two questions on different topics, or several questions on the same topic. Only one interview schedule was administered to each senior centre.

After a pilot test with six senior centres in the Edmonton region, questionnaires were mailed to all known senior centres in Alberta, a total of 345. In each centre, the president, or another member of the centre's executive, was asked to fill in the questionnaire (51 questions) and return it in the postage-paid envelope provided.

Two weeks after the questionnaires were mailed to the senior centres, a group of 19 senior volunteers began the telephone interviews. Each respondent was asked whether the questionnaire was received and returned and then the questions on one interview schedule only were asked.

All volunteers for the telephone interviews participated in an identical training process with the project coordinator. Training consisted of a two-hour group training session where the volunteers were given background information on the project, the role of the Senior Citizens Secretariat, and each also received a manual containing instructions and material for completing the telephone interviews. All volunteers were instructed to follow a prescribed format and wording during the interviews; as well, they were briefed on how to answer common questions from the interviewees. Each volunteer was assigned 15-20 senior centres to contact.

A total of 267 questionnaires were returned by senior centres; this is a response rate of 77 percent. Of these questionnaires, 222 were used, and 45 were excluded from the analysis because they did not meet the basic definition of a senior centre or because they were returned too late. Table 1 shows the positions of the people who filled out the questionnaires. A total of 309 telephone interviews were completed, and of these, 31 were excluded because the centre did not meet the basic

criteria, and several interviews could not be completed due to language difficulties, leaving 278 which were used in the analysis. The telephone interview schedules were randomly distributed to the senior centres, so each schedule had approximately one-sixth of the total responses, about 45 each. Because of this small sample size, the figures obtained from the telephone interviews were considered less reliable than those based on the questionnaire data.

It should be noted that the method of self-reporting (people describing themselves, their own behavior, and that of the organizations) used in this study has the potential for biased results. That is, people are likely to over-report desirable characteristics and under-report those seen as undesirable. For this reason, any problems experienced by senior centres may be under-represented in this report.

4.0 RESULTS

The results of the study are organized into five sections: demographic information, governing body and documents, membership, programs and activities, and finances.

4.1 Demographic Information

The centres included in this survey were from all parts of Alberta, all types of communities, and they varied considerably in size. The senior centres were grouped into twelve areas within the province. The areas and the number of responding centres in each area can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 2. Figure 2 shows how the twelve areas were collapsed into four regions: 1) Calgary and Edmonton, 2) North, 3) Central, and 4) South.

Each centre was classified according to the size of community in which it was based. Three categories were used: 1) urban (population greater than 10,000), 2) small city (population of 1,000 to 9,999) and 3) rural (population less than 1,000). Twenty-eight percent of the centres were in urban centres, 30 percent in small cities, and 42 percent in rural areas. Table 3 shows the four

regions of the province with the types of communities where the senior centres are located.

The size of the membership of the senior centres ranged from 18 to 5,000, with an average (mean) of 223, and a median of 100. The membership size was grouped into three categories: 1) small (1-50 members), 2) medium (51-100 members), and 3) large (101 and more members). Tables 4 and 5 show the centres by size and community type, and by size and region respectively. There were more large centres in small cities and urban areas, while rural areas were more likely to have small and medium-size centres. Northern and central region centres were fairly evenly distributed across size categories, while Calgary, Edmonton and southern region centres were mostly large. The greater population density of small cities and urban areas probably accounted for the increased size of senior centres compared with those in rural areas. Also, southern Alberta has a higher proportion of seniors than the rest of the province; this probably affects the size of senior centres.

The regular weekly hours of operation ranged from six to 98, with an average of 28 hours per week. Table 6 shows the weekly hours cross-tabulated with the size of senior centres. On average, the small centres were open fewer hours per week, and large centres had the most weekly hours.

Fifty-one percent operated out of a building owned by the seniors' group, and 49 percent used rented or borrowed facilities. Forty-two percent shared their facilities with other groups, while 58 percent of the centres had exclusive use of the premises. The average centre had been operating for 11 years, although the time in operation varied from one to 38 years.

4.2 Governing Body and Documents

Most senior centres were organized as registered societies, with by-laws, goals and objectives, and elected officers. Ninety-four percent reported that they were registered societies, 91 percent had

by-laws, and 76 percent had written goals and objectives. Of those with by-laws and goals and objectives, 98 percent reported that these were available to their members. Most centres had reviewed their goals and objectives within the last year (72 percent) and 91 percent had reviewed them within the last five years. Only four percent reported that their goals and objectives had never been reviewed.

In the telephone interviews, respondents were asked about the process used to make decisions about changes to the by-laws. Table 7 shows the results. In almost half of the cases (49 percent), the board or the executive was responsible for decisions about by-laws. Twenty-three percent reported the members made these decisions; sixteen percent said the board and members decided.

The members were very involved in decision-making about changes to the by-laws. Ninety-eight percent reported that the members were involved in decisions about by-laws, and this was verified by the process used to make decisions. In three-quarters of the cases, the final decision was made by members voting, with members, the board, or a committee making recommendations. In the remaining cases the board, executive, or committee made the decisions.

The vast majority of senior centres had both a board of directors and an executive committee which were elected by the members. Ninety-four percent of the centres had a board, 100 percent had an executive, and 99 percent reported that these were elected. In the previous year, centres had between one and twenty-four board meetings, with an average of eight. As well, almost all centres (96 percent) had regular or annual meetings where the executive reported to the membership. All centres regularly kept minutes of the meetings.

Centres reported an average of 46 people attended annual meetings, with a range of 10 to 300. When the average attendance is calculated as a percentage of the centre's membership, the

attendance ranges from 4 percent to 100 percent, with an average of 38 percent attending.

Many centres had specific procedures for electing boards and executive officers. Fifty-nine percent had a set term of office for certain positions, and 13 percent had a maximum number of terms that any individual can serve. The term of office varied from one to six years; 38 percent had a one-year term, 39 percent had a two-year term, and 19 percent had a three-year term. The remaining few had terms greater than three years.

As well as the officers discussed above, 86 percent had other boards or committees which were responsible for specific tasks, and 35 percent had one or more paid staff. Table 8 shows the presence of paid staff according to the size of the senior centre, while Table 9 tabulates paid staff by region. Small and medium-size centres rarely had paid staff, while about half of the large centres did have paid personnel. Calgary and Edmonton had the largest percentage of centres with paid staff, and the northern region had the lowest percentage.

In the telephone interviews, respondents were asked where or to whom they would turn if they needed assistance with some aspect of managing the centre. The largest group (23 percent) stated they would turn to their own members, board, or staff. Sixteen percent felt they would turn to their local government, nine percent to Family and Community Support Services, and nine percent to the managers of their building. Seven percent would turn to a local service group, and 16 percent did not know. Among the remaining 20 percent, suggestions included: another senior centre, New Horizons, Senior Citizens Advisory Council, Alberta Council on Aging, Social Services Department, Jewish Family Services, and professionals such as lawyers.

4.3 Membership

Most senior centres (84 percent) had more female than male members; however, 16 percent reported an equal number of men and women, or a larger number of men. Among the seniors' groups which had a majority of male members were those of a particular ethnic group (e.g. Vietnamese, Italians, and Sikhs). This difference in membership patterns probably reflects traditional cultural values about participation in activities outside of the home.

The age range of members was 33 to 102 years. The average age of the youngest members was 54 years, and the average for the oldest members was 88 years.

The number of members attending the centre in a typical day varied from four to 305, with an average of 33. When attendance is calculated as a percentage of the total membership, it ranged from two to 80 percent, with an average of 22 percent. The attendance in a typical week also varied considerably, with an average of 75 people, or 39 percent of the total membership attending (range four to 1100, and three percent to 100 percent of the members).

The membership of many centres is constantly changing. Eighty-five percent of the centres reported that they were actively seeking new members, and 47 percent had experienced an increase in membership in the last year, 12 percent have had a decrease, and 41 percent reported no change. The number of new members in the last year varied from zero to 1,000, with an average (mean) of 32, and a median of 10.

Respondents were asked in the telephone interviews why their membership size had changed. Most gave more than one reason (an average of 1.3). The figures which follow refer to the percentage of the total number of cases. A number of responses related to an increase in membership, and the change was attributed in 20 percent of the cases to improved programs, 14 percent to increased profile or publicity, 11 percent to improved facilities, and 11 percent to a

growing older population. Some centres experienced a decrease in size. Twenty-three percent mentioned the death, or move to long-term care, of members. Other factors mentioned were: a decrease in community population, competition from other senior centres, loss of interest, and poor facilities. Fourteen percent of the cases explained the lack of change to membership size by responding that the population of the community was static. Six percent responded that their centre was used to capacity already.

Almost all centres (90 percent) allowed non-members to attend activities, and only nine percent reported problems arising from this policy. Respondents were asked why seniors might choose not to attend the senior centres. Each could give more than one response, and the following figures refer to the percentage of cases rather than responses. The most common reasons given were: lack of interest (18 percent), too busy or other involvements (13 percent), distance or lack of transportation (13 percent), ill health (12 percent), and the fact that some see the centre as being for "old folks only" (12 percent). Other factors mentioned were poor facilities or activities, poor leadership, seniors were too old or too shy, seniors didn't know about the centre, competition from other centres, and religious factions.

The questionnaire included several questions about how well the centre was running. In response to the question "Overall, how well do you think your centre is running?" 62 percent replied that their centres were running very well, 36 percent reported they were running fairly well, and only two percent reported that the centre was running poorly. The question "Overall, how satisfied do you think the executive committee members are with the way your centre is run?" drew these responses: 70 percent "very satisfied," 29 percent "fairly satisfied" and one percent "unsatisfied." A similar response was obtained from the question "Overall, how satisfied do you think members are with the way your centre is run?" Sixty-eight percent responded "very satisfied," thirty-one percent "fairly satisfied," and one percent "unsatisfied."

These responses indicate that the members and executives were generally quite happy with the way their centres were running.

4.4 Programs and Activities

Senior centres can have many roles in the community. Each respondent was asked to rank order five roles according to how important they were for the centre. Table 10 shows the responses for the most important role and Table 11 shows the least important role. Most centres ranked the roles of providing social contact and activities very highly, and the role of providing information on aging very low. Centres in the north ranked the role of providing activities more highly than centres in the other regions, perhaps because northern communities are more isolated. The provision of information about aging, the provision of services and encouraging community involvement were seen as least important roles for centres.

Senior centres provided a wide range of programs and activities. Sixty-three percent reported that the centre was involved in planning future services for seniors within their community, and 48 percent had an outreach program to make contact with seniors who were isolated or could not attend the centre. Tables 12 and 13 show the presence of outreach programs in relation to region and size of centre. Centres in Calgary and Edmonton were much more likely to offer outreach to seniors than those in other regions. The southern region had the lowest number (33 percent) offering outreach. When centres are sorted by size, we see that large centres reported outreach programs more often (54 percent) than small (43 percent) or medium-size centres (41 percent).

Table 14 shows the types of outreach programs offered by senior centres, based on a telephone interview question. The figures refer to the percentage of centres which reported having each type of program. The average number of responses or programs reported per centre is 1.5. Friendly visiting, transportation and telephoning are

the major types of outreach programs provided by the centres, according to these reports.

Table 15 shows the percentage of centres which offered different types of programs. Recreational activities (cards, games, handicrafts, etc.) were the most common, at 99 percent, closely followed by social activities (e.g. dances, teas, socials) at 96 percent. Eighty-three percent of the centres had regular fund-raising activities (e.g. bingo, raffles, sales), and 70 percent had sports activities (e.g. bowling, golf, fitness). The least common activities were educational (e.g. talks, classes, library) which were reported by 64 percent of the respondents, and service activities (e.g. visiting, meals-on-wheels, information and referral, home repair) which 52 percent offered.

Table 16 shows the percentage of centres in each region offering each type of activity. All regions had a high percentage of centres which offered social, recreational, and fund-raising activities, but there was more variation between regions in the three remaining activity types. The Calgary and Edmonton region had the highest number of centres which offered sports, education, and service activities, while the north, central, and southern regions lagged behind in these activities.

Table 17 details the percentage of centres in each size category which offered each type of activity. Again, all sizes of centres had a high percentage offering social, recreational, and fund-raising activities, while large centres were more likely to have sports, educational, and service programs.

Each respondent was asked to rank five types of programs in order of how important they were for the centre. The five types of programs were: 1) educational activities, 2) creative arts, 3) recreational activities, 4) advocacy (representing the centre's members on issues affecting seniors), and 5) service activities. Table 18 shows the responses for these rankings. The vast majority ranked recreation as the most important activity. The responses for the second most

important through least important rankings were evenly distributed among the five categories. Service activities and advocacy were ranked by almost one-third of the centres as least important. Thus, there was no clear pattern among centres on these rankings. Almost all (90 percent) reported that their centres could be used by more seniors in the community, and 73 percent felt that they could provide more services for seniors. Thirty-two percent of the centres had conducted or participated in a seniors' needs assessment survey. These had been done between one and 13 years prior to the date of the survey (March 1988), with an average of four years prior. When asked how well the centre's programs and activities were meeting the needs of seniors, 57 percent responded "fairly well," 39 percent responded "very well," and only four percent felt they were not doing well.

Respondents were asked in the telephone interviews about how decisions were made with regard to activities to be offered at the centres. Twenty-nine percent of the responses indicated that the board made decisions about activities, and 22 percent stated that the members decided. Also mentioned were the executive (16 percent), the board and members (16 percent), staff and executive (11 percent), and staff (7 percent). The majority (89 percent) reported that the members were involved in decisions about activities. In response to a question about the process used to make decisions about activities, 64 percent said that members voted on proposals made by members, the board, or a committee. The remaining 36 percent of the cases reported that the executive or board made the final decisions.

The telephone interviews included questions on whether the centre had any programs for communicating with the members and community at large. In the responses there was an average of 2.5 methods used for communicating. Fifty-two percent of the centres used word of mouth, 52 percent used meetings and notices in the centre, 45 percent had a telephoning program, 31 percent used a newsletter, and 31 percent used the local newspaper. Also mentioned were posters

(14 percent), community activities (19 percent), and local radio and television (10 percent).

4.5 Finances

Questions about finances were asked both in the questionnaire and in the telephone interviews. Half the senior centres (50 percent) reported that their centres operated on the basis of a budget. When the size of the centre is taken into account, the percentage of centres which used a budget increases with the size of the centre (see Table 19). Table 20 shows who was responsible for planning the budget and for making decisions about approving the budget and expenditures, based on the questionnaire data. Most common for budget planning was the board (36 percent) and the executive (27 percent), and for making budgetary decisions, it was the board (39 percent) and the members (33 percent). The figures from the telephone interviews on who was responsible for making decisions about the budget and expenditures were somewhat different. Thirty-eight percent reported that the board was responsible, and 25 percent said the executive, 20 percent the members, and 15 percent the board and members.

Ninety-one percent reported that the members were involved in making decisions about the budget. This was confirmed by the responses to a question on the process used to make budgetary and expenditure decisions. Eighty-three percent of the centres reported that decisions were made by members voting on recommendations made by members or the board. Ninety-four percent indicated that all members had an understanding of how the centre's money was spent.

Senior centres have many different sources of funding. Table 21 shows the percentages of centres which had funding from different sources, as reported on the questionnaire. The most common funding sources were membership fees (98 percent) and fund-raising projects (83 percent), and the least common source was federal government grants (26 percent). Centre representatives were also asked to indicate the most important source of funding (the one which

provided the most money). Table 22 details the results. The most common response was fund-raising projects (37 percent), with membership fees and provincial grants the next most common at 13 percent. Clearly, many senior centres were financially self-sufficient; government grants and other types of donations were relatively scarce.

A telephone interview question addressed the different types of fund-raising activities. The most common fund-raising activities reported by senior centres were as follows: 60 percent of the centres had sales and raffles, 50 percent had meals and coffee fund, etc., 37 percent had bingo and cards, and 18 percent had membership fees. See Table 23 for a full list of responses. The percentages in this table refer to the percent of centres which reported a certain activity. Because a centre could give more than one response, the percentages do not add up to 100.

Most of the centres which responded (77 percent) indicated that they had adequate financial support to ensure future operation of their centres. However, the most common request for assistance (mentioned in the questionnaire) related to sources of funding. Approximately half of the centres (54 percent) were registered as charitable organizations.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to provide information on how senior centres are run, and how well they are running.

This report has documented a great diversity in senior centres in Alberta. They are large and small, located in cities and small villages, and in all parts of this province. They offer a wide range of programs and opportunities for seniors, and the centres are organized and run in many different ways. This diversity may be the key to success in senior centres, in that each group of seniors can design its centre around the needs and interests of the seniors in their particular area.

Within this diversity, however, there are several common themes. Most centres have a similar type of organizational structure, with a board of directors and executive committee which are elected by the members, and who report to the members on a regular basis. The majority of centres operate on the basis of written goals and objectives and by-laws, and are registered as incorporated societies.

Reports indicate that in most centres the leaders of the centre work closely with the members in making decisions about the centre's operation, and in many centres members vote on all major decisions. This indicates a high level of member involvement or potential for involvement in the operation of the centres.

Most seniors' groups are very self-sufficient in operating their centres. Most depend on volunteer labour from the members to run the centres and programs; as well, most raise their own funds through fund-raising projects, membership fees, and other projects. When confronted with some problem in managing the senior centre, the leaders often turn to their own members for assistance. These factors indicate that most senior centres are both <u>for</u> seniors and <u>by</u> seniors, and that seniors are actively participating in their organizations.

The majority reported that the primary role of the centres was one of providing social contact and activities for seniors, indicating that senior centres have retained the original purpose or focus since their establishment. Many senior centres were established as "drop-in" centres which provided companionship, socialization, and activities for seniors. Frequently, senior centres have added a wider variety of programs and services over the years, but clearly the primary mandate has stayed the same. To date few centre personnel are interested in the provision of services, information or advocacy, and these programs are not seen as important.

The question of how well senior centres are running is more difficult to answer, and must be inferred from a number of sources.

Generally, the senior centres reported that the centres were running well. The majority of responses indicated high levels of satisfaction with the centres' operation. The respondents reported that they themselves, the executives, and the members were quite satisfied with the way the centre was being run. In response to three questions to this effect, only two percent of the respondents indicated dissatisfaction.

Several open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire asked for additional comments or problems with which the centres needed help. While the majority reported that they are doing well, several common problems were mentioned. A number of centres are having difficulties with their buildings or facilities, or with adequate funding for the centre's operation. A number of centres needed help in attracting younger members, and in encouraging members to get involved in activities. A common theme was that many members want to attend the centre and enjoy its benefits without contributing time and labour to help run the facility. As a result, those centres have problems recruiting enough volunteers to run the centres and programs.

These comments lead to several related issues; one is the low rate of regular attendance. The average regular or weekly attendance reported is 39 percent of membership. As well, 90 percent reported that the centres could be used by more seniors in the community. Only 32 percent of the senior centres had ever conducted a needs assessment study of their community's seniors. These factors indicate that senior centres may not be meeting the needs of their members and the community and therefore are having problems attracting new and existing members.

In order to remain successful over time, senior centre activities must be based on the interests and needs of members and the community. The several generations of seniors may have different ideas which need to be accommodated in order to integrate them all into the organizations. As the community grows, shrinks, or changes, the leaders of the senior centres must make sure that the centres continue to appeal to seniors and meet their needs.

These comments indicate some themes for future informational material or workshops aimed at seniors' groups.

In conclusion, this study collected detailed information on 222 senior centres in Alberta. As well, a smaller amount of information was collected by telephone interview with 278 senior centres. The information was grouped into five general categories: demographics, governing body and documents, membership, programs and activities, and finances.

This survey was helpful in updating the Senior Citizens Secretariat's listing of senior centres and other seniors' groups. As well, the data will be used to identify needs for information, future workshops, and other types of educational programs. This report is available to all interested parties who want to learn about Alberta's senior centres, and to seniors' groups who would like to compare notes with other centres. It is hoped that this survey will help all Albertans to understand senior centres and their place in our society.

6. LOOKING AHEAD

In the years since senior centres first began in Alberta, many changes have taken place. Centres have grown, changed, and diversified. As buildings and facilities have been completed, centres have been able to turn their focus to programs, management, and expansion of the centre.

As Alberta's population continues to age, and the number of seniors increases, senior centres will have a more important role to play in the community. Meeting the changing needs of seniors will be a great challenge. Senior centres which currently focus on meeting their members' needs will need to look out into the community and take a more active role in meeting the needs of a wider group of seniors and the community as a whole. This may take the form of additional programs such as service activities, advocacy, and other community involvements. At present it appears as though most of our centre personnel do not see these types of program as important or needed.

The ability to meet the needs of members and the community depends on a continual process of evaluating the effectiveness of programs and making changes to reflect shifts in interests and needs. Any group of people will change over time, and therefore organizations must change as well in order to stay relevant, current, and healthy.

Seniors and senior centres have an important role in Alberta's future, and the challenge lies in recognizing the trends and mobilizing energetic and creative leadership.

FIGURE 1: MAP OF 12 AREAS USED IN SURVEY

FIGURE 2: MAP OF 4 REGIONS USED IN ANALYSIS

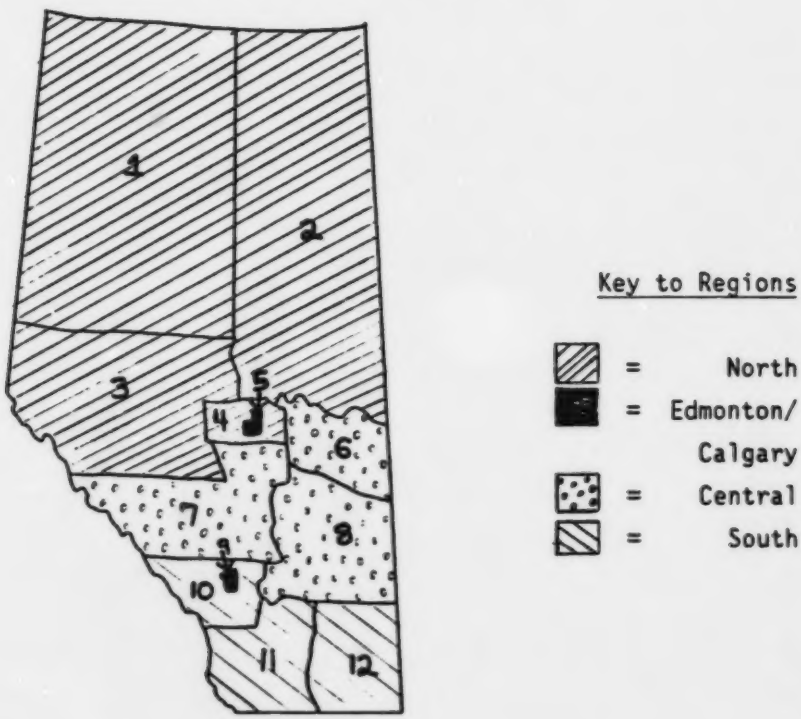

TABLE 1: POSITION OF RESPONDENTS

Position	% of Centres
President	40
Vice-President	2
Secretary-Treasurer	46
Staff	10
Other	2
	100%

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF RESPONDING SENIOR CENTRES BY AREA

	Responding Centres	
Area	Number	%
1	20	9
2	16	7
3	20	9
4	17	8
5	18	8
6	23	10
7	29	13
8	13	6
9	27	12
10	10	5
11	20	9
12	9	4
	222	100%

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY OF COMMUNITY TYPE BY AREA

Community Type	Area			
	Calgary/ Edmonton	North	Central	South
Urban (10,000 and up)	45	6	6	5
Small City (1000 - 9999)	-	27	18	21
Rural (less than 1000)	-	40	40	13

TABLE 4: SIZE OF CENTRE AND TYPE OF COMMUNITY

Size of Centre	Community Type		
	Rural %	Small City %	Urban %
Small (1-50 members)	37	14	5
Medium (51-100 members)	42	27	18
Large (101 and greater)	21	59	77
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 5: SIZE OF SENIOR CENTRES BY REGION

Size of Centre	Area			
	Calgary/ Edmonton %	North %	Central %	South %
Small (1-50 members)	7	25	28	18
Medium (51-100 members)	22	37	34	24
Large (101 and greater)	71	38	38	58
	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 6: WEEKLY HOURS BY SIZE OF CENTRE

Weekly Hours	Size		
	Small %	Medium %	Large %
0 - 9	18	15	6
10 - 19	41	34	15
20 - 29	23	23	17
30 - 39	9	13	19
40 - 49	7	10	21
50 - 59	0	3	11
60 - 69	0	1	6
70 and up	2	1	5
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 7: WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR BY-LAW DECISIONS?

Response	% of Centres
Board	30
Members	23
Executive	19
Board and Members	16
President	2
Staff	5
Staff and Executive	5
	100%

TABLE 8: PRESENCE OF PAID STAFF BY SIZE OF CENTRE

	Size		
Staff	Small %	Medium %	Large %
Yes	13	24	52
No	87	76	48
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 9: PRESENCE OF PAID STAFF BY REGION

Staff	Region			
	Calgary/ Edmonton %	North %	Central %	South %
Yes	60	21	30	41
No	40	79	70	59
	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 10: MOST IMPORTANT ROLE OF SENIOR CENTRES

Response	% of Cases
1. Social contact	54
2. Focal point for providing services to seniors	6
3. A place to encourage seniors' involvement in the community	6
4. A place to provide activity programs for seniors	33
5. A community resource for information on aging	1
	100%

TABLE 11: LEAST IMPORTANT ROLE OF SENIOR CENTRES

Response		% of Cases
1.	Social contact	1
2.	Focal point for providing services to seniors	14
3.	A place to encourage seniors' involvement in the community	14
4.	A place to provide activity programs for seniors	1
5.	A community resource for information on aging	70
		100%

TABLE 12: PRESENCE OF OUTREACH BY REGION OF CENTRE

Outreach Program	Calgary/ Edmonton %	Region North %	Central %	South %
Yes	78	43	43	33
No	22	57	57	67
	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 13: PRESENCE OF OUTREACH BY SIZE OF CENTRE

Outreach Program	Size		
	Small %	Medium %	Large %
Yes	43	41	54
No	57	59	46
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 14: TYPES OF OUTREACH

Response	% of Cases*
Friendly visiting	50%
Telephoning	27%
Transportation	41%
Nursing home programs	5%
Shopping trips, tours	5%
Meals-On-Wheels	14%
Mailed news	5%
Checking on shut-ins	5%

* These figures do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses; any centre could have one or more of these programs.

TABLE 15: TYPES OF PROGRAMS OFFERED BY SENIOR CENTRES

Activity	% of Cases*
Sports activities	70%
Social activities	96%
Recreational activities	99%
Fund-raising activities	83%
Educational activities	64%
Service activities	52%

* These figures do not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses. Any centre could have one or more of these programs.

TABLE 16: PERCENTAGE OF CENTRES IN EACH REGION OFFERING CERTAIN TYPES OF PROGRAMS

	Region			
Activity	Calgary/ Edmonton %	North %	Central %	South %
Sports	82%	69%	64%	66%
Social	93%	94%	98%	100%
Recreation	98%	100%	98%	100%
Fund-raising	84%	91%	75%	82%
Education	77%	57%	62%	59%
Service	72%	44%	52%	41%

TABLE 17: PERCENTAGE OF CENTRES IN EACH SIZE CATEGORY OFFERING CERTAIN TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Activity	Size		
	Small %	Medium %	Large %
Sports	44%	62%	85%
Social	96%	92%	99%
Recreation	100%	99%	99%
Fund-raising	82%	79%	87%
Education	52%	49%	77%
Service	44%	39%	63%

TABLE 18: IMPORTANCE OF PROGRAMS

Program	Ranking of Importance				
	Most Important %	2nd %	3rd %	4th %	Least Important %
Educational activities	2	11	31	35	17
Creative arts	4	34	23	19	19
Recreational activities	82	13	4	1	3
Advocacy	4	17	27	24	30
Service activities	8	25	15	21	31
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 19: PERCENTAGE OF CENTRES USING A BUDGET, BY SIZE

Budget	Size		
	Small %	Medium %	Large %
Yes	37	42	62
No	63	58	38
	100%	100%	100%

TABLE 20: WHO PLANS AND DECIDES ABOUT THE BUDGET?

Response	Planning %	Decisions %
President	3	0
Secretary-Treasurer	10	0.5
Board	36	39
Staff	3	0.5
Members	4	33
Executive	27	9
Board and members	5	15
Staff and executive	12	3
	100%	100%

TABLE 21: PERCENTAGE OF CENTRES REPORTING CERTAIN TYPES OF FUNDING IN THE LAST YEAR

Source	Number	% of Cases
Fund-raising projects	183	83
Membership fees	215	98
Municipal grants	99	45
Provincial government grants	111	51
Federal government grants	56	26
Service club donations	78	36
Private donations	144	66
Other	92	42

TABLE 22: MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE OF INCOME

Source	% of Cases
Fund-raising projects	37
Membership fees	13
Municipal grants	10
Provincial government grants	13
Federal government grants	6
Service club donations	2
Private donations	4
Other	15
	100

TABLE 23: TYPES OF FUND-RAISING ACTIVITIES

Activity	% of Cases
Sales, raffles	61
Meals, coffee fund, etc.	50
Bingo, cards, etc.	37
Membership fees	18
Donations	13
Charge for programs	11
Hired fund-raiser	5
Walk-a-thons	5
Building rental	5
Recycling	3
Trips and tours	3

Average number of responses per case = 2.1

APPENDIX

Alberta
SENIOR CITIZENS SECRETARIAT

2nd Floor, Seventh Street Plaza, 10030 - 107 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5J 3E4 403/427-7876

NOTICE

The Senior Citizens Secretariat and the Alberta Council on Aging are asking for your help and cooperation in a study of senior centres in Alberta. In recent years senior centres have become important for seniors all over Alberta, as places where seniors can take part in programs and activities which enhance their dignity, support their independence, and encourage their full participation in the community.

The Senior Citizens Secretariat is actively involved in gathering information about Alberta's seniors. The purpose of this study is to learn about the programs offered by senior centres, how senior centres operate, and to understand the concerns of senior centre groups. We would like to gather information that will help you to share ideas and to learn from each other.

All senior centres which participate in this study will receive a report of the study results. This is an opportunity for you to learn about senior centres all over Alberta, and to contribute to senior centre programs.

Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire, and return it as soon as possible in the enclosed envelope. It has been designed to be easy to read and easy to complete. We will call you in approximately one week to talk with you about your centre. If you have any questions, feel free to call me at 427-6437. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Looney.

Tricia Looney
Consultant for
Senior Citizens Secretariat

A Study of Senior Centres In Alberta

Instructions:

1. Please have the President, or another member of the executive of your centre, complete this questionnaire. If none of these people are available, please have a staff member, if you have staff, complete the questionnaire.

2. Please read the questions carefully and try to answer each question.

3. When the form is completed, please mail it in the enclosed postage paid envelope as soon as possible.

4. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are not obligated to answer any or all of the questions. All answers are confidential, and your name and your centre's name will not be used in any report.

I. Introduction

1. Please fill in the following information about your centre:
   Name: _____
   Address: _____
   Telephone number: _____
   Contact person (give name) _____

2. What is your position at your centre? _____

3. How many members does your centre have? _____

4. Do you have more female members than male? Yes _____ No _____

5. How many hours is the centre open each week? _____

6. How many members attend your centre in an average day? _____

7. How many members attend regularly (at least once a week)?

_____

8. Does the centre own its building? Yes _____ No _____

9. Does the centre share a building with other organizations? Yes___ No___

10. How many years has your centre been operating? _____

11. Overall, how well do you think your centre is running?
very well _____ moderately well _____ not very well _____

II. Governing Body and Documents

12. Is your senior centre a registered society? Yes _____ No _____

13. Does your centre have any written statements of:

a) bylaws? Yes _____ No _____
b) goals and objectives? Yes _____ No _____
*if yes, are these available to your members? Yes ____ No ____

14. When was the last time your centre's goals and objectives were reviewed?

_____

15. Does your centre have:

a) a Board of Directors? Yes _____ No _____
*if no, skip to question 23.
b) a President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer?
Yes _____ No _____

16. How often did your Board meet last year? _____

17. **Is the Board elected by the membership? Yes _____ No _____**

18. **Is there a set term of office for any one position on the Board?**
    Yes _____ No _____
    ***if yes, how many years? _____**

19. **Is there a maximum number of terms any person can serve?**
    Yes _____ No _____

20. Do you have annual or regular meetings where the Board reports to the membership? Yes _____ No _____
    *if no, skip to question 23.

21. How many people usually attend annual meetings? _____

22. Does your centre prepare minutes or records of meetings?
    Yes _____ No _____

23. Does your centre have any committees or advisory boards which are responsible for specific tasks or programs? Yes _____ No _____

24. Does your centre employ any part-time or full-time staff?
    Yes _____ No _____

25. Overall, how satisfied do you think the Executive Committee members are with the way your centre is run?
    Very satisfied _____ Somewhat satisfied _____ Unsatisfied _____

III. Membership

26. Do you feel that your centre is actively seeking new members?
    Yes _____ No _____

27. In the last year, has your centre's membership:
    increased? _____ stayed the same? _____ decreased? _____

28. Are non-members allowed to attend activities at your centre?
    Yes _____ No _____

29. Does this cause any problems? Yes _____ No _____

30. How many new members joined last year? _____

31. What is the age range of members of your centre?
Youngest? _____ Oldest? _____

32. Overall, how satisfied do you think members are with the way your centre is run?
very satisfied _____ somewhat satisfied _____ unsatisfied _____

IV. Programs and Activities

33. Senior centres can have many roles in the community. Please rank the following according to how important they are for your centre. Please number each item, with a "1" being the most important, and "5" being the least important. Use each number only once.

_____ a) Social contact for senior citizens
_____ b) A focal point for providing services to seniors.
_____ c) A place to encourage senior citizens' involvement in the community.
_____ d) A place to provide activity programs for seniors.
_____ e) A community resource for information on aging.

34. Is your centre involved in planning future services in your community for seniors?
Yes _____ No _____

35. Do you feel that your centre could be used by more seniors in your community? Yes _____ No _____

36. Do you feel that your centre could provide more services for seniors?
Yes _____ No _____

37. Does your centre have a program to make contact with seniors who are isolated or cannot attend the centre? Yes _____ No _____

38. How well do you think your programs and activities are meeting the needs of members?

very well _____ fairly well _____ not very well _____

39. Does your centre offer:

a) sports activities (bowling, golf, fitness, etc)? Yes _____ No _____

b) social activities (dances, teas, socials, etc.)? Yes _____ No _____

c) recreational activities (cards, games, handicrafts, etc.)?
Yes _____ No _____

d) fundraising activities (bingo, raffles, sales, etc)?
Yes _____ No _____

e) educational activities (talks, classes, courses, library, etc)?
Yes _____ No _____

f) service activities (such as visiting, information and referral service, home repair, transportation, health services, meals-on-wheels, consultation service, outreach, etc)?
Yes _____ No _____

40. Please rank the following according to how important they are for your centre. Please number each item, with a "1" being the most important, and a "5" being the least important. Use each number only once.

_____ a) educational activities
_____ b) creative arts
_____ c) recreational activities
_____ d) advocacy (representing the centre's members on issues affecting seniors)
_____ e) service activities (meals-on-wheels, information services friendly visiting, etc.)

41. Has your centre ever done or participated in a survey of the needs of seniors in your community? Yes _____ No _____

*If yes, how many years ago was the last time? _____

V. Finances

42. Does your centre operate on the basis of a budget? Yes _____ No _____

43. Who is responsible for planning the budget? (what positions)? _____

_____

44. Who makes the decisions about how the centre's money is spent (what positions)? _____

45. Which of the following were sources of income for your centre in the last year? Please put an X beside each source. Put two X's beside the most important source of funding for your centre (the one which provided the most money).

a) fund raising projects _____
b) membership fees _____
c) municipal grants _____
d) provincial government grants____
e) federal government grants _____
f) service club donations _____
g) private donations _____
h) other (please specify) _____.

46. Do you feel that you have adequate financial support to ensure operation of the centre in the future? Yes _____ No _____

47. Is your centre registered as a charitable organization? Yes _____ No ____

48. Do all members of your centre have an understanding of how the centre's money is spent? Yes _____ No _____

49. Is a specific person assigned to keep financial records?
Yes _____ No _____

50. Do you have any other comments about your centre? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

51. Does your centre need any assistance or information about any specific problems? Please explain. _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Schedule 1

Activities

a) What person or persons are responsible for making decisions about activities offered by your centre? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

b) Is the membership involved in decisions about activities? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

c) What is the process used to make decisions about activities? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

d) I am going to give you an example of a problem that could arise at a senior centre. If a situation like this happened at your centre, how would it be handled?

"Some of the members are unhappy about the new activities which have started at the centre. Recently, morning exercises were replaced by billiards. How would this complaint be handled? _____

_____

_____

_____.

Schedule 2

Bylaws

a) Who is responsible for making decisions about your centre's bylaws?

_____

_____

_____.

b) Is the membership involved in decisions about bylaws? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

c) What is the process used to make decisions about bylaws? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

d) I am going to give you an example of a problem that could arise at a senior centre. If a situation like this happened at your centre, how would it be handled?

"Your senior centre has been in operation for a number of years. During that time, one particular person has been president for over 10 years. Some of the members are beginning to think that this person should step down and let someone younger take over. Unfortunately there is nothing in the bylaws to say that a president has to step down. What should your centre do?" _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

Schedule 3

Budget

a) Does your centre use a budget? _____

_____

_____

_____.

b) Who is responsible for making decisions about your centre's budget?

_____

_____

_____.

c) Is the membership involved in decisions about the budget and spending money? _____

_____

_____.

d) What is the process used to make decisions about the budget and spending money? _____

_____

_____.

e) I am going to give you an example of a problem that could arise at a senior centre. If a situation like this happened at your centre, how would it be handled?

"Some of your members feel that the centre should be donating money to certain community charities. Presently, there is no mention of doing that in your budget. How would your centre handle this request? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____.

Schedule 4

For what reasons would seniors in your community not attend your centre?

How does your centre communicate with the members? the other people in your community?

Schedule 5

Do you have a program to reach seniors in your community who are isolated or cannot attend the centre? _____

Where or to whom would your centre turn if you needed help with some aspect of managing the centre? _____

Schedule 6

In the last year, has your centre's membership increased, decreased, or stayed the same? Why do you think this has occurred? _____

What fund-raising activities does your centre regularly have? _____